

The Fear of the Lord
By Iverna Tompkins
As transcribed by Jane Vaughn

Let us read Psalm 42 together:

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. **2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? **3** My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" **4** When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. **5** Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.

6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, And from the heights of Hermon, From the Hill Mizar. **7** Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. **8** The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me-- A prayer to the God of my life. **9** I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" **10** As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" **11** Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

This is a familiar psalm. I imagine you have read it many times, as have I. Usually, I select this one to read when I have desperate feelings within me. I like being able to identify with someone else who feels as badly as I do – it just helps me get through my hard times. "Help, O God, I cried unto You – where are You? I'm going through some things."

But my subject tonight, really more than this desperate cry, is – "***the fear of the Lord.***" I think one of the things that's lacking among God's people today is the true fear of the Lord.

In the 5th chapter of the Song of Solomon, the writer tells the story of the little Shulamite girl. She desperately goes from place to place to place trying to find her Beloved – because when He came and called to her she didn't answer – it was an *inconvenient time*. (Think about it – for that alone would preach!). Because of her delay in response, He left and when she awakened, she realized: "How foolish of me that I didn't move forward – *in that altar call* – when the opportunity was there."

She realized: "How foolish of me – when the move of God was *on* that I was too stubborn or too downcast or too anything to arise and go forward." And so she begins to search. She searches through the country and she searches through the city. Different ones find her as her search continues. In fact, even leadership discovers her – and they beat her up. (Editor's note: read God's Ravished Heart, by Iverna Tompkins, as she further develops the lessons in the Song of Solomon.).

Have you ever been beaten up by somebody when you were seeking the Lord? The way the beating goes is something like this, verbally – "Why don't you settle down? Everyone else is satisfied. What are *you* looking for?" They just do not understand that level of thirst or hunger and so they don't want *you* to be different from them.

She takes a tremendous beating and to everyone she encounters along the way she says, "Have you seen Him? Have you? Do you know where I can find Him?" And finally they ask her a question: "*What is thy beloved more than any other beloved?*" (Sol.5:9) If I'm not careful, I will stay right there because that's what people are saying to us today: "What's your God any different than any god? Why is it so important for you when – we have needs too?"

The Shulamite's response is a striking revelation. She looks at them and exclaims: "Ohh-hhh-hhh! Let me describe Him for you." And she does in this wonderful Song of Solomon. Then she summarizes with this: "I'll tell you what He is – *He is altogether lovely!*" (S/S 5:16).

Now, who can say that? I can't help but think, when we sing the songs we do.... I can't help but wonder: *Do we really know what we're singing?* We sing of His greatness and magnificence and His beauty and that He is altogether this and that and the other... and yet, we often live in a state of – *rebellion*...

Let me tell you how rebellion talks. Rebellion says, "I know what the Lord wants – and I'm just praying about it." Pause to let that one sink into your being. If you *know* what the Lord *wants*, sweet baby, there is *nothing* to pray about! It's just "do – or die"!

I believe what's lacking today – in the church – and the reason we're not moving far more aggressively into the miraculous than we have so far – and why we're not more successful in reaching the community for *His Kingdom* – with all of the things we believe in and teach (in *this* church) – is because we don't really have the *fear of the Lord*. We don't truly understand – His greatness.

How long has it been since you read Isaiah 40 where the prophet tells you how great our God is – and how He formed everything – and how He just measures the sky by a span of His hand – how He held all the waters in His hand then threw 'em out: "You be a river. You be a lake. You be an ocean."

And yet, the truth is, we think He's too little to take care of us. I hear this mournful whine: "But, I've been praying for this soooo looong, and I, I just don't understand why..." Of course you don't fully understand – you isn't Him! ☺

There are many things that we do not – and may never – understand. Can you *not* agree with that? You see – God is *not obligated* to make clear to me the why. You can't find it in the Book. It isn't in this Bible. There's no place where He says: "...and I'll tell you *why*." He just says, "I'll tell you *what* – and I'll tell you *when* – in that right moment, and not one moment before."

Oh, I can just hear your plaintive cry (whine?): " *::sigh::* Well, then, what's.... How are we to survive? If we don't know *why* we're going through what we are – and if we don't know *when* we're gonna get through it – *how* are we to make it through this mess? I mean – what kind of faith is...?" It's the same kind of faith Abraham had – when the Lord said, "Now I'm going to test you, Abe. I want your only son – the one I promised to you." (cf. Gen.22).

What in the world...? What in a man would allow him to take his only son (of promise) and offer him as a sacrifice? What allowed Abraham to start up the mountain – to move on – to say: "It's okay, son. The Lord will provide a sacrifice." (Gen.22:8). Then, after he binds the kid (actually, he was far more than a little child) – he draws forth his knife – and is ready to slay his son! What gave him that ability?

We too glibly say – "Faith." And I'm not against faith. But I am against it being the god! Selah.

God is Who He says He is. And sometimes, when I'm just being in one of my "shock everybody" moods, I say, "Forget about faith! Just trust God." You have to get this! There's a big difference!

God is Who He says He is. He is the only God! He is the *only* true and living God. He is! And if His own people don't believe it... [pause to digest that, please] ...it's because we do not truly know Him. And if we do not *know* Him, it is impossible to *trust* Him! (cf. Jer.5:4).

When you don't really know Him – if *I* don't *really* know Him – I only trust what I see – and feel – at any given moment. And that's a very limited thing. I pray this is making sense to you.

Some of you know me only “sort of.” You know me by visual recognition – you know who I am and what I do here in the church, but you don’t know *me* – because we haven’t spent lots of time together. And so, you might be prone to believe almost anything about me if it was emphatically stated to you. Even if it was negative and someone guaranteed you: “But I’m telling you, I know this about her.” You might be prone to believe that because you don’t really “know” me. True.

But my children – if you said those very same things to them, would either say, “Yeah, that sounds like her” *or* they would say, “Not my mom, I know her,” – depending on the situation – because they really do know me.

I love to sing that chorus – the one that says: “I will search for You and I will find You. I will find You will all my heart.” Do you realize that is a tremendous declarative statement? That is a commitment! That is a promise – and *you* sing it! What you’re saying is: “I’m going after You, God, and I will find You; I will find You with everything I am. I will know You.”

Now listen – when the church knows their God like *that*, then the *fear of the Lord* will return. Instead of deciding whether we’ll obey Him, we would fear to disobey. Instead of deciding to please Him, we would fear to not please Him.

You say, “Well, I don’t want to be afraid of God.” Then walk according to His precepts.

Because I always try, desperately, to give you some kind of nugget that will help you down the line, as well as where you are today, think this through. I really do think, Church, that we’re going to go through some tough days in the future – possibly in the near future. Now, I’m not a “doom-and-gloomer” – I’m a realist. And I believe all you have to do is open your eyes and see the way things are going these days. I think we need to understand that we – right now – are being prepared to be able – not just to *tolerate* – not just to *survive* – but to be able to stand and *take the lead* when others are failing and falling. But we have to know our God!

It isn’t just a matter of tenacity. It isn’t just a matter of declaring: “Oh, I will! - I will! - I will! - I will!” Because – how many times have you gone down saying, “I will!”?

It’s much more a matter of the *influence* of the Almighty God within us: “*He maketh me to...*” Say that. *::He maketh me to::* He maketh me to *walk*. He maketh me to *stand*. He maketh me to lie down. He is in charge! He is the *Almighty* God!

When we understand that as the Truth, we must also understand that there needs to come – are you ready for this? There also needs to come a – hatred of evil.

Proverbs 8:13 says this: “*To fear the Lord is to hate evil.*” God says, “*I hate pride* [that’s conceit, smugness, self-importance] *and arrogance* [as in haughtiness, superiority, over-confidence].” He hates those things (cf. Pr.6:16-19; Ps.101:5). It’s not just this that we usually hear so gently spoken: “Don’t be prideful and don’t be arrogant.” God says in this Proverb: “*I hate pride and arrogance. I hate evil behavior and perverse* [wicked, bad, mean, vicious] *speech.*”

I don’t think it was by chance, I believe it was by the specific direction of the Holy Spirit, that the worship leader led us in this particular direction this evening. And I’d be surprised if it was on his prepared list tonight – when he just began singing, “*Create in me a clean heart.*” I believe the Holy Spirit took that stream and just brought it back to all of us. And that is, truly, what has to happen: “*Create in me a clean heart, O Lord*” (cf.Ps.51:10).

Years ago, I was struggling with a particular thing in my life. It was something – character-wise – that I didn’t like about myself and I wanted to get rid of the behavior. But I kept going round and round doing the same old thing. Every time a similar situation presented itself, I responded in the same old way, just

as I always had. Can any of you identify with that? I sincerely hope you *don't* understand... Oh, by your responses, I see that you do. Well, okay. ☺

I really meant it when I prayed: “Oh, God, don't let me do this again. Deliver me from – duh-dah, duh-dah, duh-dah,” and I meant that prayer with all my heart. But now I can see what I actually meant was: “YOU do it, God, not me!”

Then one day as I was reading in the psalms, I heard *this* in my heart: “Turn me and I shall be turned” (see Ps.80:3,7). What I heard wasn't *exactly* the way it was written, but in my spirit I gleaned God's message for me in that moment and I could agree: “If YOU turn me, I promise to stay turned!”

Of course, anytime you make a commitment to the Lord, He will give you a written test – or, a living test – very rapidly. ☺ It wasn't very long after that sincere heart-response, that a situation arose where I normally would have responded in a certain way – and He reminded me: “I turned you.” Now, I didn't *feel* turned! I felt like I always had! Yet in one split second, I made a choice: “Not this time! Not *this* time! This time, I claim: I've been turned. I've been changed!”

I've had victory over that for 20-something years of my life – because He does turn us. But, Church, we must be very personally involved in remaining turned. The *fear* that I was displeasing Him overwhelmed me to a point of saying: “I want to be changed! I want to be cleansed!” The ***fear of the Lord***.

Being afraid. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*” (Heb.10:31).

You have no idea – you really have no idea – that every blessing... every blessing – like coming to this church and all of the ministry that you receive here – is making you vulnerable to God. “*Unto whom...*” Tell me the rest of that verse. “...*much is given, much is required*” (Lk.12:48b). We've been given much. Now it's time for the ***fear of the Lord*** to take hold of us.

We need to recognize – “Whew! I can't tell Him I'm innocent anymore.” I can't plead: “I didn't know that was such a terrible thing.” I can't plead to Him: “Oh, I didn't know You meant me,” because we have been taught much here, in this place. We have received *many blessings* from God – and now we are responsible.

Remember when satan came to Eve in the Garden of Eden? (Gen.3). He so innocently inquired of her: “Is it really true that God said you can't eat of these trees?” And she responded: “Oh, we can eat of all the trees except that one. We can't eat of that one or we'll die.” And what was satan's answer? He gave her his explanation: “He didn't mean die – die!” ☺ Have you ever heard that voice?

When the enemy says, “Well, it isn't really... I mean, He's not gonna do *that* to you! After all you've done for Him? He's not gonna suddenly – cut you off. You're not gonna come under the *judgment* of God; you're His beloved.”

And we sort of agree: “Yeah – we're in the New Testament! We're under the blood!”

Well, then act like it! Live like it! Break some old habits! Let's come to an understanding that we – not only God – must learn to... Did you hear me say: “learn to”? We must *learn* to – *hate evil* – because it's not natural for carnal man to hate evil. It *is* natural for carnal man to excuse it. Selah.

Evil. I'm not talking about the devil, the evil *one*. I'm speaking of *evil*. If you'd look that word up in your Bible resources, you would be amazed at the meaning. It includes gossip and slander and hurting another person. Of course we can hate the evil one – but we're to hate *evil*.

Some of us are just, you know, we're just dirty garbage cans. There are certain people that other people know who will open the lid and listen. And so they just dump. I've had people say to me, “I

don't know why I get all the garbage. I just don't know why they spill it...." DUH!! You're painted green and the lid's off! ☺ They just know you want to hear every gory little detail. "Pour it in!"

But there comes a day when the Lord will turn you – if you get to a place where you HATE evil. When you see it hurting another person – when you see injury coming – when you see slander destroying and splitting the church – and all the rest of it. When you come to a place that you just hate that – THEN the *fear of the Lord* takes over.

And THEN you can understand: "Oh, Lord, they're not mine, they're Yours! These people that are pouring out the trash – they're damaged." Begin to cry out for them in prayer: "My God, have mercy."

I even prayed that the other night when I heard the State of the Union address (Jan.2008). I don't know if you reacted to it as I did and I'm not getting all political here. But I reacted to our president's closing statement. I reacted negatively. He made this statement: "Let's learn to trust the people." Then he said, "God bless America." But my thought was: "Why don't we reverse this? Let's learn to trust the God and bless the people! Selah.

You know what happens when you're filled with the *fear of the Lord* and you *hate evil*? Wisdom comes to you. Wisdom. Often when I pray for people at the altar, one of the most common requests is: "Pray that I'll have greater wisdom." We all need that! I pray for it every day of my life. We *need* wisdom – God's wisdom.

The Bible says here's the way to wisdom: *fear God*. "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom. And if you want understanding to go with it, you have to shun evil – and that is understanding." That's what it says in Job 28:28. "*The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to shun evil, that is understanding.*"

These are not gifts – wisdom and understanding. It's not the "gift of...." The *gift of the word* of wisdom, yes (1Cor.12:8), but it's not the *gift of wisdom*.

"*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" Psalm 111:10 says. "The *fear of the Lord* is the beginning of wisdom." You begin to understand the true wisdom that *flows* into you when you understand Who your God is and Who it is you serve.

Ecclesiastes 7:18b says it like this: "*The man who fears God will avoid all extremes*" (NIV). And verse 19 adds: "*Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers of a city.*"

Mmm – mmmm! If we can take hold of these truths tonight, it's going to be a different church tomorrow. We're going to be a different *marketplace* when we step out there tomorrow. We're going to be *wise* and *harmless* (cf.Mt.10:16) because we have an honoring fear of the things that God is – His attributes – His nature. God is *holy*!

How many times do we sing: "Holy – Holy – Holy! Lord God Almighty!" Or just in the spirit, we sing: "Thou art holy! Thou art holy!" The elders around the throne at this very moment and through all eternity are singing, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty!" (cf. Rev.4). What does that mean? Think about it.

What does this mean – "You are holy!"? It means that He cannot look upon un-holiness (Hab.1:13) – so He looks at us – each one of *us* – through His Son Who *is* perfect and holy. We are covered by His righteousness (Ro.5:18,19; 2Cor.5:21; Phil.3:9). What a mighty God we serve! *That* ought to bring us to an awe! We need to sing this one with such an awareness of its total truth! "You are awesome in this place Mighty God!" *Awesome*.

Awesome God – He's in charge of your business.

Awesome God – He’s in charge of your body.
Awesome God – He’s in charge of your home and family.
Awesome, awesome God!

Often our pastor says, “He’s omniscient, omni-present, omnipotent. He’s: all-knowledge – present everywhere at once – and all the power belongs to Him. But just as often, that information goes in one ear and out the other – unless you are filled with the fear of the Lord.”

If you’ve never really worshipped Him, it’s because *you don’t have* the fear of the Lord. Because – if you have the fear of the Lord – we have to worship! And *if* we don’t bow down in worship, we do bow down – in defeat. It’s your choice.

That’s what this psalmist is saying (in Psalm 42). “I *feel* defeated. I *feel*... my heart is *breaking*. When can I come and stand before You, God? You’ve left me. You’re not there anymore.” Don’t lift your hands, but how many of you have ever felt that? And yet we know His Word promises: “*I’ll never leave you!*” (Heb.13:5; Dt.31:6).

The psalmist cries out – and we whine: “Oh, but Lord, it’s been so long since I’ve felt Your touch. It’s been so long since I’ve felt drawn to You. Oh, I don’t understand where the Lord went.”

Then the psalmist says, “Oh, I do remember – I remember when I used to lead the music. I remember when I was the leader and I used to get everyone else ready – ready to sing and ready to worship – but I’m telling you, I’m dried up now. It’s just like when a deer can’t find water out in the wilderness and it’s been running and going about and searching and it *pants* for water. Well, that’s the way I am,” the psalmist says. “I just *::pant-pant::* ”

May I be bold enough to say: some of you show that? That is true. Some of you are just.... you beat yourselves down – by recalling all the negatives: “You know – we’ve had these prophetic words – and God? I don’t know, I just don’t know. You know we’ve held on to them – we’ve *believed* – and they haven’t been fulfilled. We still have these same old problems and this and that and the other thing. Where are You, God?”

Well, just keep focusing on all the negatives.... Disregard the many blessings of God.... You will bow!! You *will* bow.

But there’s a better way to bow. We can lift up our heads – “*to the hills from whence cometh our help. My help cometh from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth*” (Ps.121:2).

There’s not one moment of your life, Sir – not one tick of the clock – from the time you were formed in your mother’s womb (Jer.1:5).... Lady, not one second – has been out from under God’s scrutiny! (cf. Job 31:4) Nothing! There’s *nothing* you’ve done, said, thought, intended, or not done – that He’s not fully aware of (Pr.5:21). And He’s still saying the same thing to us tonight that He has said long before we were born: “*I know the thoughts I have for you. I know the plans that I have for you.*” (cf. Jer.29:11).

He goes on: “You fight ‘em. You argue. You deny them. You go another way. If I don’t do them in the right time for you, you’re mad at Me – but I love you. I stretch out My everlasting love towards you (Jer.31:3). My arm is not shortened (Is.59:1; Ps.98:1). My ear isn’t heavy (Is.59:1). I’m still listening. I’m listening – for the right prayer.” Selah.

“*When can I come and stand before Him?*” he says in verse 2. Any time you want to (Heb.10:19,22). Any – time – you want to! Yes, “Thank You, Lord.”

“Well, you know there are some times when you just *feel* that drawing.” Yeah – *feel*. The Word says, “If I draw nigh to Him, He will draw nigh to me” (Jas.4:7). So that says that any time – any day – night or day – I can be in His Presence. It’s my choice. *Any* time. Whether you *feel* it or not.

Our psalmist is going through some things. He says, “The only thing I’ve had for my food are my tears (vs.3). Then I remember what I used to have.”

Now, it’s good to remember the good things – it’s sad to *live* in the past. There’s probably not a person in this building that can’t remember a time when you felt more spiritual than you do tonight. When you first got saved? When you first led someone to Christ? When you first got baptized in the Holy Spirit? When you first were baptized in water?

When was that – *utopia* – for you? That *moment*? That “high” time when you really thought: “Whew! God and I – we’re there!” Can you remember back?

Surely we do. We go back there in our minds: “Well, if I could have *that* again!”

Do any of you realize that that utopia-experience – in your life – was really intended by God to be the lowest level for you from then on? “...*from glory to glory*” – He’s changing me (cf.2Cor.3:18).

The highest moment you ever had – that time when you felt like you had absolutely finger-tipped God in heaven – right there – just – “Whew! It *was* one!” That experience?... That was when God said, “Now, that’s the lowest for you from now on! The graph goes up from here!”

We’re the ones that demand the valley!

But the Lord lives high and exalted and then dares to say, “*Come unto Me*.” One Scripture says, “I will actually exalt you to receive...” (Ps.37:34) or “I will *promote* you to what I’ve promised you.” If I was using our language today, I’d say, “Get your head up!” That’s what He’s saying; “I’ll exalt you – Get your head up!”

“Well, but things are tough for us.” I know. And they may get tougher.

“*If you’ve run with the footman and he hath wearied thee* (Jer.12:5)...” If you can’t handle things now, what are you going to do when the “*swelling of the river Jordan*...” – “*jor*” means spread or spread out and “*dan*” means judgment. So He’s asking: “What are you going to do when – the judgment is spread out? If you can’t make it *now* – if you can’t get up every day of your life *now* – and pull yourself up... What will you do when things get really tough?”

I don’t understand how you can go to bed in victory and get up in defeat – but I can do that. It’s an amazing thing. I go to sleep praising God, even singing – “Hallelujah! Bless You, Lord!” ::*snore*:: Next thing, I’m awakened: “*WHAT?!?*” ☺ It is so rare that I wake up with the same victory I experience when I go to sleep. I don’t know where it goes in the nighttime hours! ☺ Are you laughing with me or at me? ☺ But I have to start all over again! Every day! From square one! “I will praise the Lord!”

Every day! I wake up with a pain here and a pain there and a stiffness here and a... you know, and *you* wake up with heavy thoughts of what you have to do that day, or the kids are screaming already, or – or “I’m out of milk?!” or whatever! ☺ It’s another day filled with *responsibility* – and it takes every bit of effort you’ve got to push your legs to the edge of the bed and get up!

Finally, you’re standing on your feet and you’re saying, “Oh, when can I come and stand before You, Lord? Where are You? Oh, but I don’t have time right now – I can’t seek You this morning, I’ve got things to do – obligations – a job to get to – family. I’ll be there when I can.”

But instead, we *could* get up saying (or singing ☺): “I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice.” I – will – draw – nigh – to Him! I WILL! I WILL find that place again! It’s there! It isn’t that far!! He’s not really out of reach!” “Though He be close – not far – from anyone of you,” the Book of Acts says (17:27). Why does He have to say that? Because it *feels* like He’s very far.

When you get into these dry places and you’re desperately saying, “I’m like a deer panting for water.” When you get to those dry places, you – if you’re anything like me (and oh, may you *not* be!) – when you get there, there’s a tendency to say, “I need to take some time off and seek the Lord.” You won’t. It’s like paying the tithe. If you won’t give a dime on a dollar – ☺ – you won’t give ten thousand on a hundred. You see? You just won’t do it! The test – is the dime.

The same thing is true with some other things – things we *think* are true.... Consider this: You think – even plan – “Oh, when Randy Clark comes, I’ve heard – oh, I’ve heard that that’s going to be a week with God!! *I can’t wait for that!*” You won’t even like it if you don’t shape up first! ☺

The test is tomorrow – the test is every day – the test is tonight. What’s – as we say in our common expression – “What’s eating you?” or “What’s wrong with you?” And we have some pathetic response (that’s really a pathetic *excuse*): “Well, my family – my sickness – my finance – my something....” That’s it, huh? Those things aren’t *eternal*. Selah.

“Well, I made this huge mistake.” Was it eternal? No? Then God’s not worried about it.

“*Thou he fall, though he fall, he shall not be cast down, but the Lord upholdeth....*” (Ps.37:24). In other words, the Lord can pick you up faster than you can fall the next time!

You just need to know, we’ve got a *BIG* GOD! That’s where the ***fear of the Lord*** comes in. He’s going to take care of us whether we can handle it or not. He is determined!

You don’t know this unless you really *believe the Book* (When you read the Bible, do you *really believe* God wrote it? That He is the only author?) but from the time you were formed, He put your life in *writing*. (I personally think it’s written in blood!) He put *your* life in writing! (cf.Ps.139:16).

Nothing I do – nothing I do – deters that! Nothing! I can’t keep God from fulfilling what He plans to do for me. He says, “I’m gonna bless you if it kills you!” ☺ (or – *when* it kills you! ☺). “I will bless you!” God is a blesser – it’s His very nature to bless. He can’t help Himself!

He created us because He loved... and He just blesses and blesses. Every time we give Him an inch, He takes a mile! Every time I give Him any opening at all, He comes in and blesses.

There’s a man I know in this church who is living proof of this right now. It’s true. He’s been being awakened in the wee hours of the morning and having divine visitations. His problem? His problem was, he said, “Lord, I want more of you.” And so the Lord said, “Okay, you’re too busy during the daytime, but I’ll get you.” ☺ So, he has less sleep – but he has great revelation coming! I love it! Do you understand what’s happening?

God is going to bless you! “Well, if He’s going to bless me, why don’t I see it?” BECAUSE YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT BLESSING IS!!

How many of us look back through our lives and see those moments when we thought it was a disaster? And yet, had those situations not happened to us, we would not be where we are today. Well, think that one through. I didn’t know those things were blessings to *me* – because I didn’t have enough *fear of the Lord* at the time to trust Him in those difficult moments.

“*My heart is breaking!*” the psalmist says, “*as I remember how it used to be!*” And then he speaks to himself: “*Why am I discouraged?*” He didn’t assert: “I am not discouraged – I am not discouraged – I am not discouraged. I declare: I am not discouraged! You hear me? I am not discouraged. I am not discouraged.” He simply admitted it. The difference is he admitted it to the right person. He admitted it God-ward.

Then he spoke to himself again. Have you been talking to you lately? Or, do you just talk to others? Garbage cans. It might be a good thing for us to begin to talk to ourselves: “What is your problem, Iverna?” Or, “Why are you discouraged? Why are you so sad? Why do you let these things get you down?”

“Well, because people are mocking me saying, ‘Where’s your God? You still hurt, don’t you? You still have problems, don’t you? You still have some financial situations, don’t you? You still need more... You still... Where’s this God you told us about? Where are all the *miracles*?’”

Remember who asked that question? Old Gid. Remember Gideon? (Jud.6:13). The angel of the Lord spoke to him. . . . Now, that was not just any angel. This is an expression of Christ Himself – in the Old Testament – “*the angel of the LORD.*” So, we can understand that this is actually God Himself addressing Gideon. The angel (God) says, “You’re a mighty man of God. I’m going to do this and this and this.” And Gideon says in utter astonishment, “Look, if you’re gonna do all these things and I’m so *mighty*, where are all the miracles?”

Gideon didn’t know – couldn’t know – that one of the greatest miracles was right ahead of him. He didn’t know that from 30,000 to 300 God was going to perform a great miracle (cf. Jud.7:3ff). He didn’t know that he really was a mighty man of God – because he was scared of the enemy – aren’t we? – er, wasn’t he? ☺

Every negative word that was coming toward him – discouraged him. So, he was – if I use the term “hot-house plant” would you understand what I’m saying? Yes or no? No? What about a nursery where they raise little plants? Good, now you understand – he’d been raised in a *nursery*. You know – protected. He wanted to hear only positive words. Today, we might hear a timid little voice like this: “Just speak positive words to me. I get very upset when I hear negatives. These kinds of things just disturb my spirit – I have a very tender spirit.”

I’ve been around some of those, you know. They are not going to make it in the cold, or the wind, or in a storm. They will faint and fall – unable to stand or withstand.

Time to say: “Self! Get up! God, I’ve had better than this – and I’ve had that better with You. There was a moment in my life that was higher than where I am right now and that’s where I want to come back! I am coming back! Whatever it takes – I’m comin’ back in honesty. I’m gonna learn to hate evil. I’m gonna walk in Your precepts and according to Your commandments. I am going to walk in the “*fountain of life*” – the one that turns man “*from the snares of death*” (cf. Pr.14:27).

In fact, let me just read you a scripture. “*The fear of the Lord sanctifies you*”(cf. Pr.16:6). Then, here’s what it says in Acts 10:35 – “*But in every nation...*” Say it: [“but in every nation”] “*...he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.*” Is that powerful or not? That’s what this church stands for: Church for the Nations. And the Lord also says, “and I’ll answer you, too.”

Every nation that fears Him! It’s going to come to this: we’re going to be amazed at some of the nations that turn to the Lord. We’re going to be amazed at some of the people that turn to the Lord in nations that do not accept the reality of the only true and living God. That’s why we believe in missions. We are going to be amazed! We need to recognize that He promised this and it’s a fulfillment of His promise. But it has to begin – *here!*

“*In God...*” ----- “*...we trust.*” “IN GOD WE TRUST” – is still on our coins (I don’t know for how long, but it’s still there today.) Hallelujah!! It still stands as this nation’s motto: In God We Trust!! “*One nation, under God*” – it’s still there! When it’s gone, will it be gone? {*No*} Right answer.

If they put me in a box just large enough to hold this body, I will still – if I can get my mouth free – declare: “He – is – my – God!” And if they tape my mouth shut, my heart will yet sing: “In Him – will – I – put – my – trust, for He has never forsaken me!”

Speak to yourself! Encourage yourself – as David did – in the Lord (1Sam.30:6).

“Soul sorrows” are oppressive and tumultuous and stirring and excruciating, but “soul reliefs” lift us out of all depression – renew hope – and stir faith. Hope is the spoon for faith – it stirs prayer – praise – worship – and fellowship. That’s why we need fellowship groups. That’s why we need one another. That’s why we come together.

Why do you think there was a sense of His presence here tonight? “*Where two or three are gathered together in My Name...* I’m comin’! I’ll be there – “*...in the midst of them.*” (Mt.18:20).

“Oh, well, sometimes I’m all alone – what then?” Father – Son – and Holy Ghost – and *you*. ☺ I’ve claimed it many times in my life. I am not alone. I’m never alone. I can always sing: “And He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there – none other has ever known.” That’s fellowship.